

VZCZCXRO7450
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHKUK RUEHROV
DE RUEHAS #0279/01 0821805
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 231805Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7224
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO PRIORITY 0921
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY PRIORITY 1897
RUEHMRE/AMCONSUL MARSEILLE PRIORITY 1731

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ALGIERS 000279

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/23/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [AG](#)
SUBJECT: THE PLAYBILL FOR ALGERIA'S ELECTION THEATER

REF: A. 08 ALGIERS 1164
[1](#)B. ALGIERS 176
[1](#)C. ALGIERS 226
[1](#)D. ALGIERS 252

ALGIERS 00000279 001.2 OF 003

Classified By: DCM Thomas F. Daughton; reasons 1.4 (b and d).

1.(C) SUMMARY: On March 19 President Bouteflika and the five other candidates approved by the Constitutional Council formally launched a presidential campaign period that runs through April 7. The five include nationalists, Islamists and a Trotskyist, but none is expected to present a serious challenge to Bouteflika in the voting on April 9. With the exception of Louisa Hanoune, leader of the socialist Workers' Party (PT), the challengers represent political parties with narrow constituent bases and weak party infrastructures. Two of the five, Ali Fawzi Rebaine and Louisa Hanoune, ran in the 2004 presidential election and placed last and second-to-last, respectively. Moussa Touati, leader of the Algerian National Front (FNA), attempted to run in 2004 but failed to get on the ballot. Mohammed Said, leader of the Party for Liberty and Justice (PLJ), is making his first foray into the national political spotlight with his candidacy, perhaps seeking to legitimize a party that the government has yet to approve officially. Djahid Younsi will bear the standard for what is left of the Islamist El Islah party, which splintered in 2008 after being routed in the November 2007 parliamentary elections. The leading French-language daily El Watan has commented that, except for varying degrees of ideological content, the candidates' campaign platforms are almost indistinguishable and lack concrete proposals detailing how their ideas might translate into tangible policies. END SUMMARY.

TWO ISLAMISTS...

[1](#)2. (C) Political Islam will have two contenders on April 9: Djahid Younsi, the leader of the government-approved faction of the El Islah party and Mohammed Said, the leader of the unofficial Party for Liberty and Justice (PLJ). Said, 62, is a former journalist and diplomat who served as MFA spokesman in 1982 and Algeria's ambassador to Bahrain from 1986-89. He is also a long-time associate of Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, the father of Algeria's arabization movement. Said was Ibrahimi's campaign manager in the latter's failed 2004 presidential bid, which ended when Ibrahimi could not gather the required number of signatures to be placed on the ballot. Said continued as Ibrahimi's number two in the unregistered Islamist El Wafa party until announcing in January 2009 his intention to form the PLJ. He insists publicly that the PLJ is neither an Islamist party nor a reincarnation of El Wafa. But some contacts have told us the PLJ aims to gain the support of young Algerians with Islamist sympathies and that Said used Gaza protests in January to identify a demographic

that falls outside the traditional constituent base of the Islamist party in the ruling coalition, the MSP. As to his vision for change, Said has called for the repeal of the 1992 state of emergency decree and for more respect for freedom of association and speech. His platform also emphasizes job creation, engaging Algerian youth and providing more housing.

Some speculate that an ulterior motive for Said's candidacy is to legitimize the PLJ, which has yet to obtain government approval. The party's official campaign slogan is "Change now, not tomorrow."

13. (C) Djahid Younsi, 48 and the youngest candidate in the race, represents what remains of the Islamist El Islah party.

El Islah split into two factions after allegations of embezzlement and an internal leadership rivalry forced party founder Abdallah Djaballah into a faction not recognized by the government. In the aftermath, Younsi's group emerged as the government-approved faction of El Islah, forcing out Djaballah's supporters and leaving Djaballah himself without a party. The split, which appeared to be orchestrated by the government to contain Djaballah's popularity, neutralized Islah's political influence and crippled the party's infrastructure. El Islah lost heavily in the November 2007 parliamentary elections, retaining just 3 of the 43 seats the party held in the previous parliament. Younsi is campaigning as the candidate for the poor under the slogan, "This is your chance for change." He argues that Islam should play a central role in Algerian society, though his rhetoric does not echo more conservative Islamist trends that claim Islam and modern systems of governance are incompatible. Younsi favors general amnesty as a model for national reconciliation and supports lifting Algeria's state of emergency. He also promotes Arabic and Tamazight (Berber) culture as key components of Algerian national identity. On the economic front, Younsi promises to address unemployment and encourage

ALGIERS 00000279 002.2 OF 003

small and medium-size business development.

...TWO NATIONALISTS...

14. (C) Ali Fawzi Rebaine and Moussa Touati have been cast as the nationalist candidates for April 9. Both come from families with solid revolutionary credentials. Touati is the son of a martyr (a veteran killed in the war of liberation) and Rebaine's mother was a renowned figure in Algeria's battle for independence. Rebaine's party, Ahd 54 (literally, the oath of 1954), has a small base with only two seats in parliament. This is Rebaine's second appearance in a presidential race; he garnered 0.63 percent of the vote in the 2004 election against Bouteflika. Rebaine's platform contains a generic mix of patriotism, calls for democracy and pluralism, and an emphasis on reform in health, agriculture, banking and customs administration. With 15 seats in parliament, Moussa Touati's Algerian National Front (FNA) has a relatively large party base compared to Rebaine. Touati also participated in the 2004 presidential election, but his bid was cut short after he failed to collect sufficient signatures for inclusion on the ballot. Touati's campaign platform offers a brand of economic nationalism aimed at giving Algerians a greater role in the economy and decisionmaking. For Algerian youth, Touati promises to address the harraga phenomenon and restore "young Algerians' right to benefit from their country's wealth." He proposes reducing the length of mandatory military service from the current 18 months to six months and using military service to provide vocational training that young Algerians can apply to the "economic defense of their country."

...AND A TROTSKYIST...

15. (C) Louisa Hanoune is the most prominent political personality among Bouteflika's challengers and the only candidate with a popular party base and robust infrastructure

to support her campaign. Hanoune was a candidate in the 2004 presidential elections and her Workers Party (PT), which holds 26 seats in the lower house of parliament, is the largest faction in parliament outside of the ruling coalition. Hanoune is also well regarded for her notoriety as the only female candidate for president in the Arab world.

If elected, Hanoune said she will review Algeria's association agreement with the European Union and freeze all activities on WTO negotiation. She also promises to renationalize the hydrocarbon sector and re-open public factories that have closed their doors in recent years. During a campaign speech in the Bab El Oued district of Algiers, Hanoune vowed to return agricultural land to the "real farmers" and go after land speculators she accuses of ruining Algeria's agriculture sector. Hanoune is a vocal advocate for women's rights and social justice. She said she will use her campaign to help workers recover their dignity and combat fatalism. In February Hanoune's name surfaced as someone "who could handle the job" when rumors spread that Bouteflika had discussed possible successors with a visiting delegation from France. In the past, Bouteflika has referred to Hanoune as someone he has "great admiration for" and once stated publicly, "I wish I had five Louisa Hanounes" during a speech to an audience of government officials (ref A). Despite her high-level visibility, she is not expected to present a serious challenge to Bouteflika. Some observers predict Hanoune may do slightly better than the one percent of the vote she received in 2004.

...WITH NO CHANCE

16. (C) COMMENT: While the challengers walk and talk like serious candidates, local political cartoonists repeatedly depict Bouteflika's opponents as "hares" placed in the race to legitimize the election process by giving it the outward appearance of being truly competitive. The hares may dutifully run the course and complete the race (though one is now threatening to withdraw), but Bouteflika is expected to cross the finish line far ahead of the pack. The government has poured vast resources into the electoral process, carefully orchestrating each stage of the election's administration (ref B). All that remains now is to go through the motions, making the April 9 election more about process than choice. Apart from finding variations in ideological content, El Watan has been hard-pressed to distinguish among the candidates' campaign platforms and has chided them for lacking concrete proposals that might translate into tangible policies. Meanwhile, Bouteflika has the benefit of ten years in office as a reference point for voters and a well-financed, sophisticated campaign machine

ALGIERS 00000279 003.2 OF 003

that far exceeds the capacity of any of his competitors. This week Interior Minister Zerhouni said the government plans to spend more than 83 million dollars on organizing the election. In addition, it has been rumored that Bouteflika's campaign will spend approximately 69 million dollars in off-the-books campaign contributions, raised primarily from private business sources. With the playing field tilted sharply in favor of the incumbent, the government will likely remain focused on achieving a strong turnout among the roughly 20 million eligible voters, believing that with no viable alternative to Bouteflika the choice will be clear when (or if) Algerians arrive at the polls on April 9.
PEARCE